

Adoption Act which affect the doctor's role and stresses the need for collaboration between practitioners and social workers on the one hand, and doctors and adoption agencies on the other. In her view, the Adoption Act offers opportunities for fruitful collaboration and she suggests that doctors should serve on the case-committees which adoption societies must appoint to examine all proposed adoptions.

In his paper on "Adopted Children in Adolescence", Dr. D. W. Winnicott considers not only this aspect, but also raises some more basic issues regarding adoption. For example, he decides "to suspend the assumption that to be adopted is better than to be in a foster-home and to compare the two techniques". Then he argues that while in the past adoption may have been the best form of substitute care for all infants without homes, conditions have changed. Thanks to improvements in local authority services for deprived children, trained case-workers now give support to both foster-parents and foster-child. In cases where such continuing support is needed, such as children who are already disturbed at the time of their adoption, Dr. Winnicott suggests that fostering may be more suitable. He then considers this idea from the point of view of both the child and the prospective adoptive or foster-parents.

In the course of this discussion Dr. Winnicott also suggests that there are three categories of adoption and that "arrangements that suit cases in one category may not be good for those in the others". As in all his writing, the paper is rich in sensitive insights and stimulating ideas, not only about "adopted children in adolescence", but also about wider questions concerning adoption and adolescence separately.

The last contribution by Professor L. S. Penrose on "Heredity as it Concerns Adoption" gives a balanced, clear and modestly presented over-view of this extremely complex subject. His conclusions are both reassuring and challenging: they should be read by adoption workers as well as by all couples who contemplate adoption or who, when their adoption is going wrong, are taking refuge in the comforting alibi of "poor heredity".

Professor Penrose concludes by saying: "A significant thing, when we discuss this question

of heredity and adoption, is our ignorance of the effect of adoption on the child. There are very few carefully worked out studies in which the information is precise and complete . . . If we want to learn more about the changes that can be brought about by changes in environment, the systematic study of adopted children must be pursued".

The final section in this useful booklet consists of "Some references to current literature on medical problems in adoption work".

M. L. KELLMER PRINGLE

### OLD AGE

**Tunstall, Jeremy.** *Old and Alone*. London, 1966. Routledge and Kegan Paul. Pp. xi+344. Price 45s.

THE VIEW HAS often been advanced that old people are neglected in modern societies. Some writers have contrasted this neglect with the much better treatment—or even high honour—said to be accorded to the aged in less developed communities. Both sides of this antithesis need critical examination. In the first place, the meaning of "old" is necessarily quite different in developed populations of low fertility, low mortality and advanced medical care from that in primitive groups where age comes on more quickly and the really old are much rarer. Secondly, it seems unlikely that the social treatment of the aged is sufficiently uniform among all types of more primitive communities to allow of much generalization—more probably it varies widely according to circumstances. Finally, isolation may be, not so much a condition imposed from outside as a state to some extent natural to old age and in part created—even if unconsciously—by the old themselves. Such questions as these are explored in this interesting book, which approaches the subject in an impartial manner and makes good use of both a new statistical survey and of the general literature on the social aspects of ageing.

The question of the treatment of the old in non-literate and peasant societies is disposed of briefly but effectively by the author, by reference mainly to the work of anthropologists. One would like to have seen a fuller treatment, for the interest of the subject, but this would not

have accorded with the purpose of the book, which is concerned essentially with the conditions current in Britain. On these, Mr. Tunstall feels that "research, research and yet more research is needed" and it is a tribute to him that one agrees with this view even after reading the full detail of his text.

A good example of the author's scientific approach is found in his analysis of "aloneness" into four components. These are: living alone, social isolation, anomia (a sense of aimlessness, of being out of accord with the times) and a feeling of loneliness. Each of these factors is partly independent of the others, though often they are found in combination in some degree.

These forms of being alone are discussed in the first part of the book and their associations with age, sex, marital status, area of residence, social class and other factors are shown. One of the most striking findings is that old persons who live alone nearly all do so because they prefer it. Such people as they might have wished to live with are no longer available, and in most cases there is good regular contact with relatives. Family visits seem much more important than other social contacts, which even when frequent may not prevent a feeling of loneliness. Anomia is to some extent a function of retirement, particularly for the lower social classes with their narrower range of interests, and does not seem to be much connected with the other forms of aloneness in old age.

Part II of the book shows how these various aspects of isolation apply in three particular instances—the unmarried state, the recently widowed and the housebound. Single people form a strongly affected group because of the lack of relatives. Widows are in a special position in the early months following the death of the spouse, and there is a brief reference in the text to a feeling of worsened health on the part of the bereaved. Confirmation of this sensation has recently been given in medical journals. The housebound mostly have adequate help, but a small proportion manage by themselves.

A question of abiding interest is people's use of their leisure time; in those who are retired and alone this means the whole use of their time and is a topic of much relevance to the preparation for retirement movement. The book lists the

results of the survey in this respect, but the findings are only partially revealing and the subject seems worthy of further study in due course.

The author touches also on the connection between low income and low social contact, which appears to be incidental rather than of basic importance, and on the role of the social services—especially old people's clubs—another subject on which further light has been shed by some more recent research.

Although the first three parts of the book are of great interest, many readers will find the concluding section the most stimulating part, particularly in its references to the social theory of old age. It is here that the references to the treatment of the elderly in primitive and peasant societies are found. Their position in modern communities is a subject that has hitherto largely been neglected, and in consequence social theory has been developed in relation mainly to the training of children to live on good terms with their fellow men and to the maintenance of healthy social contacts in adult life. The author does not develop a general viewpoint of such a kind in relation specially to the aged, but he gives some essential facts and hopes that theorists will build on these. He points also to some consequences for social policy.

Has the sociology of old age been unjustly neglected? It is not, perhaps very surprising that interest has not been strong. Mr. Tunstall argues that as a social problem area the subject is lacking in prestige. But is not the trouble deeper than this? Is it not that old people are basically less suitable for social life than the young? Ageing represents in some respects a negation of sociology. Perhaps, after all, the theorists have been right to neglect it. But studies in the light of heredity might be revealing (if necessarily protracted) and a useful outcome of eugenic policy might be an easier twilight for both the elderly and those around them. P. R. C.

#### PSYCHIATRY

Shepherd, Michael, Cooper, Brian, Brown, A. C. and Kalton, G. W. *Psychiatric Illness in General Practice*. London, 1966. Oxford University Press. Pp. xvii + 220. Price 45s.

HOW MUCH PSYCHIATRIC illness exists in